

Radical Worship

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For anyone visiting for the first time, I am not pastor Kim, I'm Nate, and I'm the director of Music and Worship here at West Valley Presbyterian Church. We've been in a sermon series called radical discipleship, and we're coming off of, or as I like to call it, recovering from the Service Worship Conference. Being the worship director, I thought it would be good to have a little chat about worship. Someone recently asked me what my favorite part of my job is: easy... I get to hang out with amazing people, usually with a guitar in my hand, and sing praises to the Lord, our God and creator of all things. Each week I get to have nights like this past Monday: Steve, Erich, Lane and I came together for an hour and a half, and worked on music for service. But music is only half of my job title: Director of Music **AND** Worship. What's the difference?

In modern churches, sometimes these words are used synonymously. Music and Worship. When you think of a worship leader, what do you think of... you think of the person who leads the music. When we have an event here on campus, like Tuesdays Together, Session, a Retreat, and we say, we're going to open with Worship...what do you think of? Singing. Don't get me wrong here, music is certainly a part of worship. In fact, music is a huge part of worship. For job security reasons, I would go so far as saying Music is an Extremely important part of Worship.

Or scripture reading for today even talks about music in worship:

From Psalm 100:

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

Worship the LORD with gladness;

come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the LORD is God.

To come before the lord with joyful songs, that's worship right? Well, kinda.

Google the word worship. And Google will proudly return about 63.3 million articles in ¼ of a second. The first article was

*Wikipedia: **Worship** is an act of [religious](#) devotion usually directed towards a [deity](#). The word is derived from the [Old English](#) *worthscipe*, meaning *worthiness or worth-ship* —
*at its simplest – to give worth to something.**

Sounds good and simple. However Wikipedia isn't always the best resource. So I ran to my bookshelf and grabbed the latest edition of Webster's Dictionary...I'm just kidding, no one actually owns a real dictionary anymore, I Googled that too.

Still, the dictionary had another spin on the word. It said worship (then it had all those funny symbols that tell you how to pronounce it),

Then it said something interesting: noun, or verb. Huh...noun or verb.

Here we are right now, sitting or standing in the noun version of the word. We are in worship, the place, the event. We are attending worship. But that's too easy. To sit in worship, is not worshipping. To really get to the heart of the matter, we can't simply think of worship as a noun.

Robert E. Webber, considered to be one of the leading authorities on worship and worship studies, in fact he's the founder of The Worship Institute, has a book, and the title says it all: *Worship is a Verb*.

Worship is something we participate in. It is active, not passive.

Let's take a step back, and look at worship in the Old Testament. After an exhaustive study, or in modern terms I'll call it, another Google search, there doesn't seem to be just one Hebrew word that directly translates to the English "Worship". There are a lot of words that imply worship, but have other, deeper meanings. English is way to simple. We say worship, they say, well, what kind of worship. For example, one of the earliest words for worship in the Old Testament comes in Genesis 22 when God is speaking to Abraham who is about to sacrifice his son Isaac,

Genesis 22:11-12

*But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven,
"Abraham! Abraham!"*

"Here I am," he replied.

"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

In Hebrew the word they use is Yare, which means to Fear the Lord. In English we can translate this word as worship because it is an act of worship to fear the Lord. In this case, to be more specific it's not fear as in to be afraid.

I would be afraid of the Lord in this story, but another way to translate it would be: revere. To show reverence. To fear the Lord, to acknowledge that the Lord is almighty and powerful is in itself: worship.

Another word in the OT for worship is Darash, or to seek. To seek, the Lord is to worship the Lord. God desires you to seek him.

Psalm 9:10

Those who know your name trust in you,
for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

And although there are many more, the last word I want to talk about this morning is Shachah.

This is the most common word in the bible that can be translated as worship, it appears a mere 172 times in the OT, and its literal meaning is, "To bow down, or prostrate oneself." Literally to bow down and grovel.

Psalm 5:7

But I, by your great love, can come into your house;
in *reverence* I *bow down* toward your holy temple.

Let's take a look at this same verse in the King James Version:

But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy
mercy: and in thy *fear* will I *worship* toward thy holy temple.

Notice that? Same words, slightly different translation into English. And in thy **YARE**,
reverence or fear, I will **SHACHA**, bow down or worship

Notice each of these examples, and trust me, we can find many more, the act of worship is
active. It's a verb: To fear, To Seek, To bow down. There is an active participation.

Andrew Hill, in his book, *Enter His Courts with Praise* spends a whole chapter defining worship,
and in my opinion, never really gives it a definition. At the end of the chapter, however,
he does give a nice summary of all the points for what worship is, and isn't: Now this is
a lot, so I'm just going to throw it at you...don't worry I won't be testing you on this
section:

- Worship is first and foremost a response to God. God is the initiator of worship
through creation, and through his covenant promises with us.
- Worship involves the whole person, mind, body, emotion
- It is complex, diverse, and can be highly specialized
- It is a relationship more than a function or ritual. I like that one.
- It could be true or false (there is a such thing as false worship...just read the old
testament)
- It can be formal or informal, structured or spontaneous.
- It's a lifestyle more than an act or event
- And it's motivated by love not duty.

Now we're getting to it. It's a lifestyle, not an event. It's motivated by love, not duty.

The key ideas here are that worship is a response. We are responding to God, and to God's love,
and that worship is more than a simple event.

The word worship is like the word Marriage. I'm a little bummed that Kacey can't be here in church this morning because I think I'm about to score some major points with this next one, and trust me, there are times when I'm in need of a few extra points saved up in the bank.

Anyway, the word worship, is like the word marriage, or even maybe friendship. But let me focus on marriage. You see, it's a word that has a definition, but it also has a meaning, and an event. You can define it all day long. You can read books about it. You can plan for it, but you'll never understand it until you're there. It takes work, and patience, and some give and take, but in the end, it's greater than the sum of the two parts. Marriage is a relationship more than an event. It should be treated as a verb, not a noun. Kacey and I would not have the marriage we have today if it we simply treated our marriage like a noun. We had a wedding, we got married...I was there, what's next. You see, it has to be an active relationship. When she speaks I need to...I need to... oh boy, there's something I'm supposed to do, I can't seem to remember right now.

Friends, I know you know this, but I'll say it anyway: God, our father in heaven is speaking to us. And we need to listen, and we need to respond. We need to respond out of love, not duty. A response for the unending love that God is giving us.

But what are we really talking about here? Are we fearing God? Are we seeking God? Are we bowing down, both literally and figuratively? I think when we come here, to church we are. We hear God's word and many times we're reminded of God's power, I know sometimes that instills fear in me. If not a terrifying fear, definitely the reverence I talked

about earlier. And I think we're all here because we are seeking God. And though we may not be literally falling down prostrate, I think we do bow down to God, especially in our prayers. So that's enough right? We come to worship once a week and get our check mark. Check, good job...see you next week.

I think that might be where we fall short. Remember worship is a verb, not just a noun. Worship can take place anywhere, any time. As a music director, some of the best worship experiences I've had are sitting with the praise team in rehearsal, singing songs of praise and thanksgiving. For me that can be better worship since I'm not thinking about what comes next in the service.

As I've been saying, worship is so much more than the noun. God doesn't call us to come to church and sit and listen to a sermon. Nowhere in the bible does it say, and thou shalt attend the 9:30 service at WVPC. But God does command us to worship Him. Don't get me wrong, we NEED this time together. We need to gather together, at least weekly, I would argue at least twice that often, to support each other, build each other up, and recharge...but if that's all we're doing, I'm afraid we're missing the mark. If that's all we're doing, is coming together once a week, worship has fallen into the noun category.

After all this research, the best definition I could find of worship comes from the Word itself. In

Romans 12:1 it says,

“Therefore I urge you Brothers, and Sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – This is your spiritual act of worship.”

In view of God's mercy...God grants us mercy, so in response to that...

Offer your bodies as living sacrifices...

Your spiritual act of worship.

Paul says, your true act of worship is to offer yourself, Holy and Pleasing to God...He doesn't say your true act of worship is to stand together perfectly on cue and sing perfectly in tune.

In other words, present yourselves in a manner that is pleasing or acceptable to God. But how do we, a broken, fallen group of people enter into God's presence? How can we be *Holy* and *Pleasing* to God?

Jesus makes it easy for us...

In Matthew Chapter 22:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

What an absurd question right. Greatest Commandment? A commandment is a commandment.

The Commandments were to be followed completely. But Jesus responds:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as

yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

That's right friends. To worship God, to fear God, to Seek God, and to bow down before God is to Love God. Remember, God initiated this conversation. And he began the conversation with, "I love you."

And God loves us SO much. Most days I'm not sure why, but God's unending love flows down so freely. So how do we say I love you in response? How do we say I love you, to the one who loves us so much, that he sent His one and only Son to live among us, and carry our burdens to the cross? How can we even come close to say I love you?

I learned something about 5 years ago. And it's the type of thing you can't be taught, you have to learn it on your own. Many people in this room already know what I'm talking about, and some will fully understand someday soon. I've always liked accolades. You can come up to me, and tell me that I sounded good on guitar today. I'll say thanks. You sang beautifully. Nice sermon. You can even say you look nice, or you're a good golfer (then I'd know you're lying).

But if you really want to tell me that you love me. If you really want to get me right here (heart), love on my kids. The first time I saw someone give my daughter or son a genuine hug. Or play with them after service. Or laugh with them, nothing else matters. If you want to love me, love my kids. If you want to worship God. If you want to Love God, love on his Son. Love on his children. All of them.

Matthew 25:40

'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

You see friends, for me, worship isn't about when to stand, when to sing, when to clap. I've been asked, Nate, when are we supposed to stand or sit, or when are we supposed to sing during worship. And my ultimate response is...I don't care. I know that view is a little bit radical. I know that's out of people's comfort zone, but in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,

In a few minutes, we're going to sing together. And in view of God's mercy, in response to God's love, if your response is to sit with your eyes closed and hear the word, do so...as a response.

If your response to God's love is to sing along...do so, as a response.

If your response to God's love is to stand and sing your heart out, do so as a response.

Will you worship the Lord this week? Will you fear the Lord this week? Will you seek the Lord this week. Will you bow down this week? Will you Love the Lord this week?

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. That is the first, and greatest commandment. You want to worship the Lord. Love Him. You want to Love the Lord, show love to his children.